

KIND NRS AMENDMENT TO HR 2123

NRS Background

- Beginning in the fall of 2003, the NRS test has been administered twice yearly to all four- and five-year-old English and Spanish-speaking children enrolled in Head Start.
- The NRS tests children in the areas of early literacy, language, vocabulary and number knowledge skills.
- Approximately half a million children have been tested twice a year since its inception – an unprecedented testing of young children.
- According to HHS, development and implementation of the NRS has cost \$25 million dollars.

Expert Concerns

- The appropriateness and uses of testing with young children for the purposes of accountability has not been clearly established by assessment experts (one of the reasons testing in NCLB doesn't begin until 3rd grade).
- The National Academy of Sciences report *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers*, published in 2001, states:

“All assessments, and particularly assessments for accountability, must be used carefully and appropriately if they are to resolve, and not create, educational problems. Assessment of young children poses greater challenges than people generally realize. The first five years of life are a time of incredible growth and learning, but the course of development is uneven and sporadic. The status of a child's development as of any given day can change very rapidly. Consequently, assessment results -in particular, standardized test scores that reflect a given point in time -can easily misrepresent children's learning.”

....Assessment itself is in a state of flux....uses of assessment data for purposes external to the classroom, rather than to improve educational practice directly, place a particularly heavy burden both on the assessment instruments and on the responsible adults.... If the use of external standardized tests increases in the preschool environment for reasons of

public policy, it is essential that they meet the highest standards of reliability and validity.”

- Since the NRS was designed in spring 2003, child development and early education experts have voiced strong concerns about its design, implementation and use. In short – they believe it is inappropriate.
- A recent GAO study (GAO-05-343) also concluded the NRS had not demonstrated adequate reliability and validity to be used for accountability purposes.

“If the test is to be used as a measure of program performance or to assess changes in child outcomes, it is important to ensure that it is sensitive to the range of development typically demonstrated in Head Start. Based on our analysis and that of the Technical Working Group and independent experts, we continue to believe that further study is necessary to ensure that the NRS results are reliable and valid and the results are appropriate for the intended purposes.”
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Kind Amendment

- HR 2123 as reported from Committee, requests a study by the National Academy of Sciences to examine the appropriate standards and benchmarks for school readiness and valid measures of assessment for children in Head Start. The National Academy of Sciences is highly regarded for its independence and credibility in this area of study.
- The Kind amendment will suspend implementation of the NRS until the forthcoming National Academy study can be used as a guide by HHS to determine what, if any, is the appropriate role of assessment in Head Start.
- Until child development and early education experts can agree about the appropriateness of the NRS, we should not be spending millions of dollars on its implementation and subjecting 500,000 children to it every year.